DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 171 025 EC 115 234

AUTHOR Anderson, Ruth B.
TITLE Rural Education for the Gifted: Activities at the University of Maine at Presque Isle.
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Convention, The Council for Exceptional Children (57th, Dallas, Texas, April 22-27, 1979, Session T-75)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Creative Activities; *Curriculum Development; Geography; *Gifted; Identification; Individualized Programs; Resource Centers; *Rural Education; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *University of Maine Presque Isle

ABSTRACT

Programs and courses about the gifted in rural areas have been offered by the University of Maine at Presque Isle since 1973. Activities (such as designing and building rockets, play writing and producing, and park design) and workshops have been held for and about the gifted. One of the problems with programs for this population is that they are spread over such a wide geographical area that it is difficult to provide adequate educational facilities and faculty. Funding is another problem, as public support is traditionally for the disadvantaged, while leaving the gifted to "make it on their own". One solution is a concentration on individualized programs since separate classes cannot be supported. A regional resource center would also facilitate the exchange of materials and other resources. The two main tasks are the identification of the gifted and the development of curriculum for these students. The university is considering a program of gifted education or a gifted minor in special education as methods of training teachers for the needs of the gifted. (PHR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED171025

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

RURAL EDUCATION FOR THE GIFTED:

ACTIVITIES AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT PRESQUE ISLE

T75

Ruth B. Anderson, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
Chairperson, Division of Education
University of Maine at Presque Isle

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

CEC

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EC 115 234

RURAL EDUCATION FOR THE GIFTED:

ACTIVITIES AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT PRESQUE ISLE

Background of University Beginnings

Interest in gifted education at Presque Isle goes back to the Summer of 1973, when we offered our first course dealing with the creative-gifted area. Since then, the Division of Education has offered courses each summer. A sample of courses is as follows: Aesthetic Education, Creative Teaching and Learning, Creative Education, Curriculum for the Gifted and Talented, The Gifted Learner, and Providing a Learning Environment for the Gifted.

We have provided workshops to local school districts upon request and have been asked to speak at many area functions. We have even been invited back to the same organizations for follow-up workshops. We believe that the public must be well informed before interest and support for gifted programs will be forthcoming. We have spoken to parents' and women's groups such as the Officer's Wife's Club at Loring Air Force Base and the American Association of University Women. The Division of Education will hold a rather large Reading Conference on campus next month. One session which I will lead will be devoted to Reading Activities for the Gifted Learner. Three gifted programs from several nearby towns will be represented by teachers and children who will

share some aspects of their gifted reading programs. Puppetry, creative writing, and a Great Books for Juniors Program will be presented.

Two summers ago at the University, children were involved in activities centered around their interests:

(1) A group of eight to ten year olds was interested in space and rocketry. They began their study of air and space by designing kites and flying them. The activities culminated in the building and launching of rockets.

(2) A group of teenagers wrote a play, directed it, and filmed it for a closed circuit TV presentation.

(3) A group of six to seven year olds worked on a series of language arts activities which culminated with a TV presentation.

(4) A group of eight and nine year olds interested in public parks throughout the United States studied the topic and designed and constructed model parks.

During the school year, faculty and students have cooperated with public schools in programs for the gifted. We are currently experimenting in a program for science education for the gifted. The program consists of college students enrolled in a special education practicum consisting of a series of field trips designed by the college students to support work done by the classroom teachers. The students have taken advantage of the resources of the University, as well as of the community, and have taken

school children to such places as a green house and a museum display of animals in connection with their study of plants and animals.

Another school has received a grant for Gifted Elementary children and is involved in a program which the school feels will promote creative activities. One of our part-time art faculty assists the program by providing many exciting experiences at the school and also on the campus for the children. They come to the art gallery to create wood sculptures and clay pieces. They also experiment with many different materials.

Problems of Rural Programs for the Gifted

One of the difficulties we find in planning programs for the gifted in rural areas is that gifted children are not located in clusters. Instead, they are spread throughout the geographically separated population. Therefore, there are few children identified as gifted in each school in the many communities. Actually, as one reads the literature, he/she discovers that the major programs in gifted education are in the larger population centers. According to Ernest Newland[1], education needs of the gifted in population centers of 25,000 and less have been neglected because of inadequate educational facilities and inadequately trained faculty. He further states that 15,000,000 public school children live in rural areas and that probably 500,000 to 750,000 are gifted.

---

[1] T. Ernest Newland, The Gifted in Socio-educational Perspectives, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976), pp. 292-294.

In Northern Aroostook County, we are disadvantaged in a number of ways, if we compare ourselves to affluent cities. We are lacking in facilities, in trained specialists, and in human resources.

We are a geographically isolated agricultural area with potatoes being the primary marketable crop. We had counted on Loring Air Force Base to assist us by providing human resources and use of their facilities, but the Base, which has been very generous in the past, will be cut back 80% of its current strength, thereby depriving us of this resource.

Cost of fuel and the fact that we have no public transportation will cause us further complications.

We have a variety of different kinds of schools in our area. The one room school house has disappeared, but we still have small neighborhood schools. Some schools have reorganized into middle schools and others will follow this direction. High schools range in size from 3,452 in Presque Isle and 2,908 in Caribou to 1,270 in Fort Fairfield and 307 in Easton. Some of the smaller communities have already consolidated. However, we will always have the problem of finding enough gifted students in a single district to support a program.

Another difficulty is that while parents and teachers are quite willing to support programs for the handicapped, many oppose spending additional funds for young people they already consider

over-priviledged. They are willing to help disadvantaged to become more equal, but they do not wish to help the gifted to develop their skills further. The needs of the disabled and handicapped are more apparent and many erroneously believe that the gifted will "make it on their own."

If one looks at the history of gifted education, one can see that support has been given from time to time for special education for those identified as gifted, but programs have not been sustained over a long period of time. Usually a crisis (such as the orbiting of Sputnik into space) is responsible for renewed interest in the education of the gifted.

Research indicates (according to the Report on Bicentennial Mid-Year Leadership Training Institute in Kansas City, January 26-27, 1976)[2] that 10% to 20% of the nation's gifted and talented students become high school dropouts, that a much larger percentage never attend college, and many more realize only a slightly greater degree of potential fulfillment." In rural areas, concentrations of gifted students are not great, but educational and psychological needs of the students are great. It is necessary to prevent drop-out for the good of the rural society, because the needs of society for gifted and talented persons to solve present and future problems is great. Although we find that the bright and out-going students are usually recognized by their teachers and administrators, we wonder how many talented youngsters are

---

[2] Norman Hall, "Educational Leadership: Its Responsibilities to the Gifted and Talented Student," p. 32.

yet to be discovered. It seems that with added effort, we should be able to identify a great many as yet undiscovered talented and gifted school children in Northern Maine.

Future Tasks

We know that we have many difficult tasks ahead of us. We have tried to provide ways of informing parents, students, and the community of the importance of providing opportunities for the gifted to grow. But we need to do more.

We need to identify creative and interested teachers who want to work with the gifted. It is my feeling that the teacher is the single most important factor in working with young people. Good teachers have always taken into account the interests and needs of the child, and the gifted is no exception. We need to provide teachers with opportunities in which to develop necessary knowledge and skills. We need to find funds and facilities for programs. In reality, we will have to become innovative and take advantage of the limited community resources available to us, because it is unlikely that adequate funding will become available. Schools will increasingly continue to have financial problems.

In view of the above, rural schools should concentrate on individualizing instruction according to talents, interests, and needs because the limited population in each school probably cannot support separate classes. Because individual differences

vary so greatly with the gifted, it probably is not desireable in any event. I believe in encouraging cross-age interests and experience and do not feel that gifted students should be bound to honor our arbitrary grade levels. If lack of grade level worked well for the Little Red Schoolhouse, I believe it would work for us in Aroostook County. Students can share their talents and knowledge at the same time that they learn from each other.

Resource Center

I believe that a regional Resource Center would be an asset in rural areas. Today, private schools are not feasible for the gifted because of small numbers of students, and funding becomes more difficult each year. In the case of Aroostook County, it would be logical if the Center were located at the University of Maine at Presque Isle where students could take advantage of such resources as the library, computer center, art gallery, the language, self-instructional and science laboratories, television studio, recreation and physical resources, science museum, athletics, the arts, literature, music and the general educational facilities. In our case, the Center would need to be federally funded initially, but later, school districts could contract for its services and send their few gifted students from each district to the Center. The districts would be spared the expense of providing the great spread of teacher talents and the variety of materials and facilities necessary for responding to a great variety of

pupil needs. From time to time, entire classes could utilize the Center and take advantage of the many opportunities open to them.

I can see unlimited possibilities. The opportunity for rural young people to work with artists, historians, authors, musicians, scientists, and experts in every area of athletics is exciting indeed! We would also rely heavily on talented volunteers to work with young people. There are a number of retired talented faculty in the area, and I am confident that we could get some talented college students in each area to offer assistance to young people in their particular area of interest.

Thus, the Center would provide the selected students with distinctive experiences to help them identify areas not as yet developed by them, as well as expand the knowledge and talents they already possess. However the programs are set up, it will be essential for the University to work closely with classroom teachers and school administrators so that the program can be integrated with that of the public schools. An evaluation of the program and services will be essential to provide the best possible programs.

Tasks

An important task will be to identify the gifted in all areas. The following areas are suggested by Gallagher.[3]

---

[3] James Gallagher, Teaching the Gifted Child, p. 10.

1. Observation of teachers
2. Nominations by peers
3. Discussions with parents
4. Nomination by authorities who know students
5. Pupil products and artistic expressions
6. Creativity tests
7. Autobiographies and case studies

One of the advantages of being in rural areas is that it is usually possible to get to know the school child and his/her family background. It is helpful to know the economic background, the value system, and emotional climate of the family, the family's aspirations or feelings of despair when planning programs for particular children or when helping them to discover their own capabilities and the responsibilities that giftedness brings to them. The program should begin in the early grades and continue throughout high school.

A final task to be accomplished will be that of determining the curriculum for the rural gifted. One of the factors to be considered involves pupil initiative and leadership ability. This is a crucial area, because it concerns our nation's future. It is a relatively inexpensive topic to be considered in curriculum development because the rural setting offers youth much opportunity to grow in this area. In small schools, students must assume responsibility to accomplish tasks or the tasks won't be accomplished, because there are few students to perform them. Schools can capitalize on daily occurrences for the practical part of the curriculum and offer the theory at the Center.

An important part of the curriculum should provide for the development of original ideas that includes creative and critical thinking.

We need to give students the opportunity to explore current issues in society and the world which will prepare them for citizenship in the future. In addition, they should have the opportunity to explore all areas that are available to them, including the arts. An introduction to career possibilities should be given consideration also.

As stated earlier, funding in the next few years will be a problem in many rural areas. However, there are ways to supplement whatever funding is available. In the case of a Resource Center located at the University, many resources are readily available. We can take advantage of interlibrary loans. Parent groups, college sororities, Kiwanis and other service clubs are often looking for worthwhile projects. They could provide funds for kits (such as math and science) that are available in great numbers on the market today; museums will lend kits and displays free of charge. Many colleges allow high school students to take courses, often providing scholarships; and there are many correspondence courses available for those whose interests cannot be satisfied through the school district or Resource Center.

Future Plans

The question which faces those at the University of Maine at Presque Isle today is where do we go from here? The Division of Education has an Intent to Plan in the Chancellor's Office. It is an Intent to Plan an undergraduate program in Gifted Education. The Plan has already been returned by a committee, because it was felt that it should be offered on a graduate level and that teachers need a general education before they can specialize. Since we educate Special Education teachers on an undergraduate level in our System, it seems to make sense that we could do the same for teachers of the gifted. Of course, the fact does remain that the demand for Special Education teachers in our State is greater for teachers of the handicapped than of the gifted. But this should not deter us from our goal of training teachers for the gifted.

There is a feeling by some that there is a need for teachers who are already certified but who wish to receive further training to work with the gifted but who do not necessarily wish to work for a master's degree. There will also, no doubt, be a few out of State and Canadian teachers interested in the program. (These groups have been involved in summer programs during the past few years.) Our largest group will probably come from those who will take our regular Elementary Education and use their free electives to take the gifted program.

We now have an option available for a gifted minor in Special Education which was designed as a result of the Leadership

Training Grant. In the final analysis, I hope we can provide a stronger program than this.

Another problem is that our State has not moved boldly in the area of gifted and talented education and no certification or guidelines are provided for teachers of the gifted as yet.

Our other alternative is to seek cooperation from our larger sister institution which grants masters degrees. The program then would be the sister institution's program and not Presque Isle's, which is rather disappointing considering the amount of time and effort which has already been devoted to our gifted activities.

Despite the obstacles a small campus like ours faces, one can be sure that there will be a strong program for gifted and talented on the Presque Isle campus before very long.

April, 1979

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gallagher, James J. Teaching the Gifted Child, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1975), p. 10.

Martinson, Ruth A. Identification of the Gifted and Talented, (Office of the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, Ventura, California, 1974) pp. 6-8.

Newland, T. Ernest. The Gifted in Socio-educational Perspectives, (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976), pp. 292-314.

New Directions for Gifted Education, Leadership Training Institute, March, 1976, "Educational Leadership: Its Responsibilities to the Gifted and Talented Student," p. 32.

Milne, Bruce G. National Association Secondary School Principals' Association Bulletin, March, 1976, "Programs for the Gifted in Rural Areas."

April, 1979